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ABSTRACT

The North Carolina Partnership for Accelerated Schools was created to contribute to North Carolina's efforts to reform its educational system. Nine schools (seven elementary schools and two middle schools) that are in this partnership are profiled. The schools profiled were at various stages of implementing the Accelerated School process and had designed their own strategies for working toward the shared goals of the program. The report uses four categories to describe the schools' progress: climate survey, academic climate, program highlights, and professional development. A climate survey was developed to help the schools identify areas that needed improvement. School climates change for a variety of reasons not related to improvement strategies. Redistricting, faculty attrition and replacement, new administrators, and reconfiguration of grade levels all affect a school's climate. Survey items were written so that they related to the program goals and assessed whether teachers felt empowered and involved in decision making, whether powerful learning opportunities and recognition were available for all students, and how well school communities (parents, students, and school staff) worked together. Results do not indicate that individuals have changed behavior and attitudes, but rather describe school community's behaviors and attitudes. (RJM)

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North Carolina Partnership for

Accelerated Schools

PROFILES IN SCHOOL CHANGE

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PROFILES IN SCHOOL CHANGE

The North Carolina Partnership for Accelerated Schools

Review of the 1996-97 School Year

Project Description

The North Carolina Partnership for Accelerated Schools was created to contribute to North Carolina's efforts to reform its educational system. Representatives from three educational agencies have worked collaboratively to implement the Accelerated Schools Project: 1) Public Schools of North Carolina, 2) Local Educational Agencies, and 3) Teacher Educators (North Carolina State University and East Carolina University). This three-way partnership, the first of its kind in the nation, provides resources, support, and a philosophical framework for changing school cultures. Goals of the project are to help schools:

- use democratic decision-making processes by including parents, administrators, and faculty to empower the total school community to become responsible for the education of all students;
- provide high quality powerful learning experiences for all students while communicating high educational standards; and
- support teachers as agents of change.

The North Carolina Partnership for Accelerated Schools included nine schools from five counties in North Carolina during 1996-97. The five counties represented were Caldwell (Kings Creek and Sawmills Elementary), Charlotte-Mecklenburg (First Ward Elementary), Durham (CC Spaulding, Eastway, Watts Elementary, and Rogers-Herr Middle), Franklin (Laurel Mill Elementary), and Wayne (Goldsboro Middle). These schools had a high percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch (up to 85%) and Aid to Families with Dependent Children (up to 60%). Seven of nine schools had student populations comprised of more than 50% minority; Kings Creek and Sawmills had less than 5% minority enrollment.

The schools were at various stages of implementation of the Accelerated School process and designed their own strategies for working toward the shared goals. Some of the schools went through restructuring changes while implementing their Accelerated School Program. C.C. Spaulding added pre-kindergarten in 1995-96; Rogers-Herr served grades 6 through 8 through 1994-95, then changed to grade 6 only beginning in 1995-96; and Goldsboro Middle School served grades 7 and 8 only through 1994-95, then added grades 5 and 6 in 1995-96.

CLIMATE SURVEY

Although Accelerated Schools shared common program goals, each school designed their individual strategies for achieving those goals. A school climate survey was developed for

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schools to use to help them identify areas which needed focus in their improvement efforts, and to help them monitor progress toward the program goals. School climates change for a variety of reasons not related to improvement strategies. Redistricting, faculty attrition and replacement, new administrators, and reconfiguration of grade levels all affect a school's climate. Survey items were written so that they related to the program goals and assessed whether teachers felt empowered and involved in decision making, whether powerful learning opportunities and recognition were available for all students, and how well school communities (parents, students, and school staff) worked together. Results do not indicate that individuals have changed behavior and attitudes, but rather describe school community's behaviors and attitudes.

The survey was administered to faculty at all schools at the end of the 1996-97 school year. Spring 1997 item frequencies were compared with the first administration of the survey for each school. First Ward, Goldsboro Middle, Laurel Mill, Rogers-Herr, C.C. Spaulding, and Watts Schools first administered the survey in Fall 1995; Eastway, Kings Creek, and Sawmills Schools first administered the survey in Spring 1996.

• **Eastway** completed its first year as an Accelerated School. At the end of this year, 22% more teachers indicated that they were beginning to vary their instructional styles to meet the needs of all students (68% to 90%). The percentages of teachers reporting that they frequently used open-ended discussions and inquiry/guided discovery projects increased slightly. In addition, the percentage of school staff reporting that many students receive honor and recognition for academic performance also increased by 11% (63% to 74%).

• **First Ward** completed its second year as an Accelerated School. Although the climate survey showed little positive change toward behavior and attitudes that support the Accelerated School goals, there was a 34% increase in the percentage of teachers who reported that many students receive honor and recognition for academic performance (55% to 89%); a 12% increase in teachers who report discussing teaching methods and strategies with each other (73% to 85%); and a 12% (88% to 100%) increase in teachers who encourage students to collaborate to find a variety of problem-solving approaches.

• **Goldsboro Middle School** completed its third year as an Accelerated School. The most positive change in the beliefs of the staff were related to more varied teaching styles and expectations for students. The percentage of teachers who responded that all students should receive the same enriched curriculum and instruction as gifted and talented students rose by 13% (from 49% to 62%). The survey also showed an 11% decrease in the percentage of teachers who believe that a student's home background is the primary factor that determines individual student achievement (59% to 48%). In addition, the percentage of teachers who experiment with different teaching styles rose 11% (49% to 60%).

• **Kings Creek Elementary** completed its first year as an Accelerated School with many changes in the attitudes and behaviors of school staff. The positive changes related to teaching styles and learning opportunities included: a 40% increase in teachers who experiment with different teaching approaches (16% to 56%); a 37% increase in teachers who encourage students to collaborate to find various approaches to problem solving (58% to 95%); a 26% increase in teachers who believe students have many leadership opportunities (58% to 84%); and a 23% increase in teachers who vary their style to meet student needs (60% to

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83%). Other changes included a 40% increase in teachers who like the idea of change (16% to 56%); a 49% increase in teachers who believe that parents have a significant role in the educational program (27% to 76%); and a 17% increase in the belief that teachers are asked to participate in decisions concerning administrative policies and procedures (77% to 94%).

• **Laurel Mill Elementary** completed its first full year, having begun participating in the Accelerated School Project in January 1996. The climate survey reflected the following changes in teachers' attitudes toward students: a 52% increase in teachers who believe low achieving students are as well behaved as other students (28% to 80%); a 46% decrease both in teachers who believe that there are many noisy, poorly-behaved students (62% to 16%) and that there are many disruptive difficult students in the school (66% to 20%); a 32% reduction in teachers who use strict discipline to control many students (76% to 44%); and a 24% decrease in the percentage of teachers who believe that a student's home background is the primary factor that determines individual student achievement (68% to 44%). The survey reflected a 64% decrease in teachers who felt that decisions about running the school are usually made by the principal or a small group of teachers (80% to 16%) and a 28% increase in teachers reporting an active parent group existed at the school (48% to 76%).

• **Rogers-Herr Middle School** completed its fourth year, having gone through major restructuring changes during its third year. After two years as an Accelerated School that served grades 6 - 8, Rogers-Herr served only grade 6 beginning in 1995-96. Consequently, many changes in school staff occurred. From Fall 1995 to Spring 1997 the survey showed a 39% increase in teachers reporting that the school has an active parent group (55% to 94%); a 35% increase in teachers reporting that many students receive honor and recognition for academic performance (59% to 94%); and a 10% reduction in teachers who believe that decisions about running the school are usually made by the principal or a small group of teachers (52% to 42%).

• **Sawmills Elementary** completed its first year as an Accelerated School. The survey results showed a 34% increase in teachers who report they are encouraged to be innovative (57% to 91%); a 32% increase in teachers who report much experimentation with different teaching approaches at the school (29% to 61%); a 17% increase in those who believe that all teachers in the school hold consistently high expectations for all students (49% to 66%); and a 9% increase in teachers reporting that the school has an active parents group (75% to 84%).

• **C C Spaulding Elementary** completed its fourth year as an Accelerated School. Survey results showed the greatest positive changes occurred in the school's recognition of student abilities and teachers' attitudes toward students. From Fall 95 to Spring 97 the survey showed a 52% increase in teachers reporting that many students receive honor and recognition for academic performance (45% to 97%); a 39% increase in teachers who reported that a wide variety of student talents and abilities are recognized and rewarded (43% to 82%); a 37% increase in teachers who reported that most students are well mannered and respectful to school staff (34% to 71%); a 20% increase in teachers who believe that all students can and should receive the same enriched curriculum and instruction as gifted and talented students (54% to 74%); a 22% increase in teachers who believe the school has successful preventative strategies for helping students at risk of school failure (66% to 88%); and a 30% reduction in teachers who believe that a student's home background is the primary factor that determines individual student achievement (51% to 21%).

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• **Watts Elementary** completed its fourth year as an Accelerated School. Comparing Fall 95 survey results to Spring 97 showed minimal progress toward the program goals. However, there was an 18% increase in teachers reporting that they are frequently asked to participate in decisions concerning administrative policies and procedures (58% to 76%).

ACADEMIC CLIMATE

Changes in the percentages of students scoring at grade level or above on the North Carolina End-of-Grade achievement and State Writing tests were used to describe schools' evolving academic climates. Comparisons were made by genders and races across time to describe changing academic climates of schools and do not indicate progress by individual students or by longitudinal cohorts. To provide a context, academic climates were also compared with the counties in which the schools reside.

• **Eastway Elementary** demonstrated improvement on EOG tests at all grade levels. The most significant gains were found for math, with scores increasing by 22% for third grade, 11% for fourth grade, and 11% for fifth grade. In addition, the percentage of students considered proficient in writing increased from 17% before program services were provided to 29% following one year of services. Black males made gains in every comparison except fourth grade reading; for example, the percentage considered proficient in third grade reading increased from 36% before services to 58% following one year of services.

• **First Ward Elementary** showed the greatest gains on EOG tests for the black male population across the three years of the program. The percentage of black males considered grade level proficient improved from before to after two years of service in third grade reading (from 13% to 36%) and math (from 20% to 36%), in fourth grade reading (from 14% to 24%) and math (from 23% to 29%), fifth grade reading (from 17% to 42%) and math (from 20% to 33%), and sixth grade reading (from 18% to 20%) and math (from 18% to 50%). Writing scores also rose for all subgroups of students; overall 37% of students were considered proficient in 1994-95, while 44% were considered proficient in 1996-97. The gap in writing scores between First Ward and the county decreased from 17% before services to 10% following two years of services.

• **Goldsboro Middle School** made gains on EOG achievement tests at all grade levels. The most noticeable increase occurred at grade 8, with the percentage of students scoring at or above grade level increasing by 14% for reading (from 59% before the program to 73% following program implementation) and 13% for math (from 41% before the program to 54% following program implementation). Black males made the most dramatic improvement across grade levels; for example, at grade 8 scores increased by 26% for reading (from 44% at or above grade level before the program to 70% following program implementation) and 21% for math (from 31% before program implementation to 52% following program implementation).

• **Kings Creek Elementary** made the most consistent gains on EOG tests at the upper grade levels. For example, at grade eight the percentage of students considered proficient in reading increased from 55% in 1995-96 to 68% in 1996-97, and for math increased from 63% to 71% in math. Writing scores also improved both at grade four and seven.

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• **Laurel Mill Elementary** demonstrated some improvement at each grade level for EOG tests. The percentage of students scoring at or above grade level improved for 3rd grade math, 4th grade reading and math, and 5th grade math. The most significant gains occurred for 4th grade math, with a 16% improvement (from 48% to 64%) in the percentage of students scoring at or above grade level, and 5th grade math, with a 15% improvement (from 40% to 55%). Black males and females made gains at most grade levels; for example, black males showed an 18% increase in 4th grade math (from 44% scoring at or above grade level before services to 62% following services), while black females showed a 23% increase in both 4th grade reading and math (from 29% before services to 52% following services).

• **Rogers-Herr Middle School** showed considerable improvement at the sixth grade level on EOG achievement tests. Overall, before services only 42% of students were considered proficient in reading, while 57% reached proficiency following 1996-97. Results were similar for math, with 41% considered proficient before services, and 61% reaching proficiency for 1996-97. Rogers-Herr also narrowed the achievement gap with the county for both reading and math. Mean scale scores showed a 5 point gap for reading and a 7 point gap for math before services; in 1996-97 there was less than a one point gap for both EOG tests.

• **Sawmills Elementary** made gains at every grade level on EOG reading and math tests. The percentage of students considered proficient in reading increased by 9% at grade 3, and by 3% at grade 4; for math the percentage increased by 9% at grade 3, by 8% at grade 4, and 9% at grade 5. Writing scores improved as well, with 48% considered proficient in 1995-96, and 54% considered proficient in 1996-97.

• **C C Spaulding Elementary** primarily showed gains on EOG math tests. For example, at third grade the percentage of students considered proficient on EOG math rose from 48% before services to 56% in 1996-97; for fifth grade the percentage increased from 54% before services to 67% in 1996-97. Writing scores improved also, with an increase of seven percentage points across the years of service.

• **Watts Elementary** demonstrated several gains on EOG reading and math tests. The percentage of students at or above grade level rose from 36% (before services) to 49% (following 1996-97) for fourth grade math. In addition, the percentage of students considered proficient increased from 49% to 53% for fifth grade reading.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Accelerated Schools made some key instructional changes as they raised expectations and increased opportunities for students, faculty, and parents.

• Laurel Mill Elementary School implemented site-based management and comprehensive-management block scheduling to allow time for school improvement cadres to meet. The school increased faculty communication by scheduling time in the school day for teams of teachers to meet to make decisions about the school so as not to take-after school time away from teachers for planning and parent meetings. The school's Integration Cadre also integrated the curriculum more fully in two ways: they chose a new basal reader series that related to the

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science and social studies curriculum, and they worked with the BEP teachers to incorporate the regular classroom curriculum with their lessons. The school also implemented the statewide third grade pretest for the EOG testing program and examined the grading system, identified areas where grades were inflated, and raised the standards for assigning students' course grades. Students in the school were required to create portfolios of their work which were used to monitor their progress. Parent contact and conferences increased, as the parents were notified via a letter from the principal with report cards to indicate whether students were working above or below grade level in math and reading. Report cards were redesigned to indicate whether students were working at Levels I, II, III, or IV, as defined by the NC EOG testing program. During the fourth six week period, teachers were required to have a conference with the parents of all students who were working below grade level (Levels I or II). In these conferences they discussed: specific goals and objectives for the subjects; specific activities and processes that the school would use to address the areas of concern; and specific activities the parents could use at home to help the child make progress.

• C. C. Spaulding Biosphere Magnet formed a partnership with the School of Environmental Science at Duke University during the 1996-97 school year. The Magnet Theme Cadre worked with the Duke University community to plan a dedication of the Life Lab and the official announcement of their partnership. The partnership allowed Spaulding to use the expertise of students and staff at Duke to refurbish a greenhouse, establish several environments on the school grounds, and to build a nature trail. Faculty and staff held celebration events to reflect on accomplishments and plan for future goals. Mood music was played at reflection sessions in order to promote the bonding of staff. Spaulding also became the first school in the state to have a HOST (Helping One Student Succeed at a Time) Math program. This program included individual math tutors for 30 minutes a day for participating students. The Family and Community Cadre planned and organized dinners and outings which were a great success. The Creative Teaching and Learning Cadre at Spaulding established a monthly writing theme for all grade levels, and developed field trip guideline documents linked to curriculum. In addition, students were tutored daily in reading skills in groups of five. Activities such as literacy discussion groups and Reading Recovery strategies were used. The school's Reading Recovery teachers provided support and assisted teachers in finding appropriate activities for the groups.

• Goldsboro and Rogers-Herr Middle Schools collaborated to produce Hamlet with visiting artist, Joseph Henderson. Later, Mr. Henderson included a Goldsboro Middle School student in the performance at the Kennedy Center in Washington DC.

• Staff at Goldsboro Middle School developed a large number of interdisciplinary units which were shared with all staff and used throughout the school. The units concentrated on core areas, such as communication skills, social studies, math and science. They also implemented a guided reading program, targeting students who scored at Level II on EOG Reading. This program focused on improving and developing comprehensive reading skills. Teachers developed nine week tests based on the district's pacing guides and the EOG format to monitor students' skills and mastery levels.

• Both Sawmills and Kings Creek Elementary Schools were involved in the Taking Stock Process during the months of October through February. The three principles of Accelerated Schools were put to practice: Unity of Purpose, or dedication to accomplishing a task; Empowerment with Responsibility; and Building on Strengths. These two schools are Total Quality Sites and are involved in integrating the principles of Total Quality with the Accelerated School

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concept. A group of parents and staff at Eastway formed a group called BAHA (Blacks and Hispanics are Alike) to promote better relationships among the races.

• Kings Creek Elementary also worked to integrate Total Quality and Accelerated Schools principles. The school completed Vision Training and Taking Stock during the 1996-97 school year. Teachers worked more closely with parents to help make the school a better place and provide quality learning opportunities for all students.

• First Ward Elementary school implemented several changes in instructional delivery styles. Teacher-directed whole group instruction decreased and teacher-facilitated small group instruction increased. Extension teachers provided authentic integrated powerful learning experiences, such as mini-museums and Readers Theater. Grades pre-kindergarten through 6 participated in Readers Theater, a program in which contracted artists brought history and literature alive for young learners. "Performers" included Einstein, Beethoven, King Ludwig, Amelia Bedelia, and detective Nate the Great. Students participated in these powerful learning experiences by creating props, scripts, and performing for peers.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Faculties in Accelerated Schools are committed to providing powerful learning experiences for all children. To do so, teachers created new collaborative practices among themselves and explored innovative solutions to accomplishing new goals.

• At Laurel Mill, teachers participated in a writing-by-grade-levels workshop. Teachers then designed and used writing prompts at all grade levels. Staff also participated in staff development sessions to gain computer skills. Teachers began taking homerooms to the microcomputer lab on a scheduled basis, and homeroom teachers accompanied their students to the Josten's Computer Lab (Title 1) during their assigned times.

• Goldsboro Middle School faculty presented papers on math, interdisciplinary units, and Accelerated School Strategies at regional and state conferences.

• Kings Creek Elementary staff attended many professional development activities, including Total Quality workshops, ADD workshops, Grant Writing Workshops, and Reading Renaissance. The school also received several grants and scholarships, including: Certificate of Clinical Competence, NC State License in SLP, Barbara Deverick Scholarship Award, Education Foundation Grant for KCAS Publishing Center, and Broyhill Family Foundation Grant.

• Teachers at Sawmills attended a variety of professional development in-service training, including Integrating Total Quality and Accelerated Schools, Software and Internet Training, and a variety of workshops that focused on teaching reading and mathematics.

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